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TITLE: A Qualitative Analysis of Effect of the Female Condom on Men's Sexual Experience

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OBJECTIVES: To assess the effect of female condom (FC) use on the sexual experience of men in heterosexual relationships and evaluate the impact of their experience of the FC on use pattern.

METHODS: As part of a prospective efficacy study, female STD clinic patients received a behavioral intervention promoting the use of the FC. Selected participants were recruited for a qualitative interview and encouraged to bring in a male partner for a similar interview. Interviews were transcribed, double-coded and verified using a standard retrieval coding system.

RESULTS: The 24 male interviews analyzed included 9 "consistent" users (>4 FC uses) and 15 "experimenters" (1-4 uses). In comparison to sex with a traditional male condom (MC) and sex without a condom, consistent users reported greater pleasure in FC use than did experimenters. Furthermore, consistent users noted enhancement of pleasure due to "peace of mind." They worried less about pregnancy and STD than with the MC, due to confidence that the FC would not break. Experimenters frequently complained of the FC feeling "artificial," "unnatural," "rubbery," or "impersonal" in comparison to no condom. Some even found the FC considerably less natural than the MC. Consistent users, on the other hand, tended to describe the FC as feeling "natural" or "vaginal." Loss of interest in the sexual encounter due to waiting for insertion emerged as the experimenters' primary complaint. Consistent users sometimes expressed displeasure about insertion time. However, their reaction was milder and apparently unrelated to loss of interest in sex.

CONCLUSIONS: Men rely on the FC as a safe alternative to the MC. Despite the intervention's emphasis on mastery of insertion, delay of intercourse was an important criticism of the device. Involving men in the process of insertion may minimize disruption of the sexual encounter.

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